

A BRIEF GUIDE TO **MONITORING** ANTI-TRANS VIOLENCE



A brief guide to monitoring anti-trans violence

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Introduction

Transgender Europe (TGEU) has been focusing on research of trans and gender-diverse people's experiences of violence and crime since 2009. In cooperation with partner organisations globally, the Trans Murder Monitoring (TMM)¹ research project has been systematically monitoring, collecting, and analysing reports of murders of trans and gender-diverse people worldwide. According to the findings of the project, a total of 3314 trans and gender-diverse people were reported killed in 74 countries worldwide between January 2008 and September 2019. As the murders of trans and gender-diverse people are not systematically recorded, the actual number is certainly much higher.

TGEU's ProTrans project was created as a collaborative endeavour with LGBT and trans groups and NGOs to monitor violence and human rights violations against trans people in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where evidence had been scarce and anecdotal for a long time.² TGEU's partner organisations additionally provided legal aid and community support to victims/survivors of violence, and advocated for legal and social changes to improve the situation of their communities.

The present booklet aims at serving as an easy-to-use guide on the basic concepts of monitoring based on TGEU and its partners' experiences in the field, accumulated in the past 10 years. It seeks to be a tool to support organisations and activists in reporting, collecting, and analysing anti-trans violence in their contexts and engaging with regional and global monitoring mechanisms.

¹ See more about the TMM project on transrespect.org/research/tmm

² See more about the ProTrans project on tgeu.org/pro-trans



Performance "Masks" held by Geten, in Belgrade, Serbia, for TDoR 2019.
The concept of the performance was written
by the trans organisation Spektra, Montenegro.
Photo credit: Aleksandar Crnogorac

The monitoring process

Trans rights activists all across the world use various methods to observe and document how the human rights of trans and gender-diverse people are violated in different contexts and spheres of life. Common elements of their monitoring work are as follows:

- Close observation of a situation or individual case - monitoring - carried out to determine what further action needs to be taken.
- Monitoring is carried out over an extended period of time.
- Monitoring usually involves collecting or receiving a large quantity of data.
- Standards are used as reference in systematically assessing the situation or case in question.
- Tools or instruments are used in identifying how the situation compares with established standards.
- The product of monitoring is usually a report about the situation, containing an assessment of the situation which provides a basis for further action.³

Data collection might rely on various **data sources** when monitoring incidents (victims, witnesses, police, media, NGOs, etc.). If the aim is to produce credible data, it is essential that the data collected is based on direct evidence as much as possible. Therefore, reports that come to TGEU's attention should be verified if possible; e.g. besides the victim's reports or media articles, it is important to also ask witnesses about their perceptions, if any. Proper follow-up is especially important if the source of information is a newspaper or any other less credible media outlet. In TGEU, the main sources of data include evidence collected by community activists and media

³ Guzman, Manuel, and Bert Verstappen (2003). What is Monitoring. HURIDOCs. huridocs.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/whatismonitoring-eng.pdf

reports within its Trans Murder Monitoring project, while in the framework of ProTrans, participating NGOs directly receive data from those who have suffered a discriminatory or violent act, mainly through providing services to them. Several other tools might be used by activists, such as community surveys, interviews, questionnaires, etc.

In TGEU's monitoring work, **standards** relate to obligations set by international and national laws and policies. Since the main focus of TGEU's monitoring is violence against trans and gender diverse people, definitions of criminal laws on the national levels and in international frameworks, such as hate crime standards are used to assess violations of norms and motivation of the perpetrators.⁴

Hate crimes are criminal acts motivated by bias or prejudice towards particular groups of people. This could be based on gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, religion, age, or disability. A hate crime comprises two distinct elements:

- it is an act that constitutes an offence under the criminal law, irrespective of the perpetrator's motivation; and
- in committing the crime, the perpetrator acts on the basis of prejudice or bias.

Thus, the perpetrator of a hate crime selects and targets the victim based on their membership or perceived membership to a particular group. In the case of anti-trans hate crimes, it is based on the perception that the victim is trans or gender-diverse.

⁴ See more on standards and classification on tgeu.org/pro-trans

During documentation work, individual cases are assessed against national and international standards using the tool of **bias indicator identification**. Bias indicators are criteria that can assist trans rights activists in determining whether a particular crime should be classified as a hate crime, targeting trans and gender-diverse individuals. The fact that the assailant committed a crime against a trans person based on their gender identity or expression signals a societal environment that is fuelling anti-trans crimes, thus activists can point to larger exclusionary systems of bias that expose trans people to violence.

Monitoring purpose is to provide a basis of action in the face of a certain situation or case. Monitoring results provide insights into the lives of trans people and everyday problems, deepen understanding and knowledge of the nature and depth of violence and discrimination in specific contexts, especially outside urban centres, help deconstruct myths and stereotypes that feed stigma and discrimination, and also help develop and advocate adequate initiatives, mechanisms, policies needed to protect and support trans persons.

Activists undertaking monitoring regularly produce information, in the form of **reports and campaigns**. These reports detail the findings in a given period and/or provide an overall assessment of trans and gender-diverse people's situation, or a sub-group of the community.

“As an individual activist, informal group, or small or national NGO, one may become overwhelmed by the thought of engaging with the UN and think that you need to be an expert on the entire system to become involved. This is not the case. It is true that some international organisations pursue long-term engagement with UN processes, participating in lobby work around how human

rights should be understood. For this type of advocacy, it is indeed necessary to know the workings and politics of the UN machinery in detail. However, there are ways for activists, groups and NGOs to become engaged right away. Using cases as evidence-based information could be helpful in local advocacy.”

TGEU' Toolkit on UN advocacy for trans activists⁵



TvT and ProTrans publications can be found on tgeu.org and transrespect.org

⁵ Karsay, Dodo (2015). Making the UN work for you: A toolkit for trans activists. TGEU. tgeu.org/making-the-un-work

BRAZIL

“Our goal starting to monitor data was to bring attention of the public and government to the violence faced by the trans population in Brazil. Much more than demonstrating the murder data, we try to broaden our research in order to shed light to attempted murders, human rights violations, and social murder, which is extremely perverse in our country. Hence, the importance of this data collection to show people that beyond the process of social exclusion, we are being murdered daily and cruelly, and that the state does little to guarantee our rights and safety. One of the main challenges is to work with the underreporting of cases. We generally use media news, and the press in the country rarely use our definitions properly. The cases also reach us via social networks, and we have to verify their veracity, date, location, etc. The work is basically voluntary since there is no funding for that in Brazil. We have to bear the costs of research and collection, website maintenance, etc. Another challenge is to improve the methodology, and for that we would need training to develop a unified one for all parts of the globe.”

Sayonara Nogueira, Instituto Brasileiro Trans de Educação, Brazil

HUNGARY

“We need to collect data on everyday realities to be able to highlight the systemic discrimination and violence trans and gender nonconforming persons face. The fact that in our country no severe violence can be considered common does not mean that our communities are not discriminated and don’t face violence. With the gathered information, we can get insights on how anti-discrimination and anti-hate crime legislation protects or does not protect those to be protected.”

Tina Orban, Transvanilla, Hungary

KYRGYZSTAN

“For the past 5 years our monitoring system has been revised and modified. We perform monitoring online as well as offline. The challenge is that in our context we have a lot of cases of suicide because of the systematic violence and transphobia, but most international organisations do not include these cases in their data and research.”

Trans activist, Labrys, Kyrgyzstan



Nationalist group holding a picture with people and a rainbow flag on it.
The main aim of hate groups in Kyrgyzstan is to promote
the idea of traditional/family values.
Photo credit: AKIpress news

Involvement of trans communities

Community-based groups led by trans and gender-diverse people are the best placed to reach out to their communities and engage them in monitoring and documentation work. Communities are involved in various ways by trans groups; most of these NGOs and collectives engage in direct work with trans individuals, such as running support groups and organising cultural events, or are in constant communications in online fora, chat groups, social media platforms, and hotlines. Besides face-to-face meeting with victims/survivors, a common method of monitoring violence is training and engaging with peer colleagues, who provide services and outreach often to the most marginalised members of the community, such as sex workers, migrants, or trans detainees.

TURKEY

“Sex workers came together in Istanbul, Izmir, Mersin and Ankara provinces. In-group trainings were organized on how trans people and sex workers can access justice mechanisms. In our fieldwork, we continue to systematically provide guidance and information on the rights violations of sex workers.”

Trans activist, Red Umbrella Association, Turkey



March on International Women's Day
2019, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

KYRGYZSTAN

“In 2019, we organised a workshop amongst LGBT people and parents at our Community Center on the Trans Day of Remembrance. Together, we brainstormed about how we, as communities, could improve the situation and prevent trans people from suffering violence. Activists drew up a protocol of how the case is handled, starting from registering at the NGO – moving to the shadow report at UN Committees – government receiving final recommendations to implement.”

Dias Daniyarov, Labrys, Kyrgyzstan

Involving trans and gender-diverse people in monitoring and documentation, whether as employees or peer workers, entails various challenges. Based on TGEU and its partners' experiences, some of the major obstacles to implementation of consistent monitoring with trans involvement are the following:

- Trans groups are addressing serious and widespread human rights issues that trans communities face, without the human and financial resources that they need. Face-to-face interviews and the operation of a phone hotline require great capacity to assist victims of transphobic incidents, thus careful consideration needs to be given to the data collection methods used.
- Trans community groups often face hostility from anti-trans, so-called feminist groups, or more subtle forms of exclusion from mainstream LGBT groups. This not only affects the mental health of trans activists, but also impedes their ability to secure resources for monitoring work, which is often done by these groups without sufficient outreach to trans people.
- Victims' needs and rights also need to be catered for when engaging in systematic monitoring. Often, trans groups operating on shoestring budgets lack capacity to act in accordance with

relevant data protection legislation, provide services that can mitigate the effect of re-traumatisation of the victims and establish follow-up protocols.

- One of the greatest challenges in monitoring violence against trans people is re-traumatisation, as persons providing accounts of violent incidents committed against them need to often relive traumatic experiences. This raises concerns about security, privacy, coming out, self-determination, identity, trust, which can deepen an already very vulnerable state that a trans person is in and increase a sense of stigma leading to underreporting of incidents of violence and discrimination.
- As trans people are used to different forms of violence and discrimination, they often use “normalisation” as a coping and defence mechanism, making it difficult to ascertain and recognise situations of discrimination and ill-treatment.

BRAZIL

“There were several reports with duplicated or inconsistent data, leading to several criticisms even from the trans movement itself. The ideal would be a partnership of all institutions. IBTE (Instituto Brasileiro Trans de Educação) is writing a report together with ANTRA (Associação Nacional de Travestis e Transexuais), but the data collection is done separately, with data and information exchange. In 2018, we created the LAC Observatory, where we release all data from Latin America and the Caribbean with the contribution of Latin American activists. The more organisations make these partnerships, the more consolidated and unified this work will be. But unfortunately, many times the ego prevails, which leads to a failure in establishing partnerships and collaborations.”

Sayonara Nogueira, Instituto Brasileiro Trans de Educação, Brazil

HUNGARY

“Underreporting is a huge challenge. People do not want to report because they believe nothing would happen and nothing would change. In our context, cases of severe violence are rare and trans and gender nonconforming people believe that the discrimination and violence they face is part of their life.”

Tina Orban, Transvanilla, Hungary

TURKEY

“Police are not taking actions when it comes to violence against trans sex workers even though our communities are subjects of violence from police. Trans sex workers get administrative fines when they complain about violence, which discourages them from reporting. Community organisations are empowering trans sex workers by increasing information on their rights. We are holding trainings in several cities on trans sex workers rights to justice.”

Trans activist, Red Umbrella Association, Turkey



*Training on access to justice mechanisms.
Photo credit: Red Umbrella, Turkey.*

Tips on individual and community well-being

- Monitoring violence against trans and gender-diverse communities should not be the responsibility of one staff person/activist. It is important to train more individuals so that tasks can be taken over if one feels overwhelmed psychologically by the work.
- Sufficient training should be given to those who get directly in contact with victims/survivors of violence, especially if no professional psychological and legal help is available at their organisation. Trained peer workers should receive regular counselling and support within the organisation.
- Safeguarding policies should be established at the organisation in order to lay out procedures and mechanisms that ensure that help and support to those at risk of abuse is offered in an ethical and safe manner.
- It is important to clarify expectations before monitoring begins to avoid burn-out. Many groups expect that a huge number of cases will be reported at the beginning of the process that will be useful in “proving” the extent of violence the community faces. However, in reality, showing the benefits of reporting to the community takes time and trust of the process, and often only happens after years of monitoring work.
- It is crucial to understand the negative effects of monitoring work on the people involved and to take measures to support them and their wellbeing. Especially for trans activists, the negative impact of working on issues related to anti-trans violence can be massive and long-lasting.

BRAZIL

“Personally, after I started mapping and being in daily contact with photos and videos of dead people, often beheaded and dismembered, I developed night terror. I believe that my mental health was deeply affected, as I often see myself in the cases, sometimes thinking that I could be next and, mainly, due to the lack of action by the State. It is distressing having to deal with a daily problem that happens in the country, which is a vicious circle of exclusion that leads to this type of violence and, at the same time, feeling helpless for not being able to change this situation. Therefore, for the people who do this type of work, professional support is essential to maintain a balanced mental health.”

Sayonara Nogueira, Instituto Brasileiro Trans de Educação, Brazil

HUNGARY

“Being an activist is always lonely but monitoring violence makes it even more difficult. When one is facing situations in their work where no real support can be provided and one hears sad stories every day, self-care becomes crucial. The person has to develop their own techniques to be able to combat challenges arising and to be able to continue the work. When there is no possibility to withdraw ourselves from our communities, this can be really demanding and burn out symptoms can be heavy. We feel useless and we feel our work does not bring success.”

Tina Orban, Transvanilla, Hungary

KYRGYZSTAN

“I expect from myself to provide support immediately in urgent cases, I feel nothing can wait. At the same time, I want to isolate myself from everyone and do the work in an secluded space.”

Trans activist, Labrys, Kyrgyzstan

KYRGYZSTAN

“Sometimes I feel useless and lacking experience working at an LGBT organisation. Colleagues neglect achievements and the general atmosphere at the organisation makes me feel alone.”

Trans activist, Labrys, Kyrgyzstan

SERBIA

“We actively promote the importance of self-care and well-being of trans people on different levels – through our trans support group, LGBTIQ SOS Helpline, free therapy and counselling that we provide, consultations through our social networks, publications. Self-care is a premise for our well-being especially in transphobic and oppressive environments that we live in, with many constant stressors, however it is very challenging for people to receive support and help from the institutional system that is inefficient, insensitive and lacks knowledge and capacities in regard to trans specific care, especially outside urban centres.”

Sasha Lazic, Geten, Serbia



TDoR 2019, Belgrade, Serbia.
Photo credit: Aleksandar Crnogorac

Campaigning as a force for community building

Since 2017, Transgender Europe has also been campaigning online around the Trans Day of Remembrance, collectively defining actions with its members and partners. The core of each campaign is a video highlighting violence against trans and gender-diverse people and a message to the community, accompanied by stories of trans people and activists, in-depth exploration of patterns of violence affecting sub-groups of the trans community, namely trans and gender-diverse sex workers and detainees, and visual materials to use at community memorials and online actions.



Trans community in Central Asia preparing an action on 17 December, International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, while participating at a trans leadership camp. Photo credit: Trans activists in Central Asia.

SERBIA

“We organised a performance on TDoR. The concept of the performance is simple but powerful: while wearing masks, participants hold black signs on which their negative personal experiences are written, such as ‘my mother told me no one would love me’ or ‘I was beaten up because I’m trans’ or ‘I had to be sterilised to change my documents.’ After about 10 minutes, people who can and are out take their masks off and everyone turns over the signs. The other side of the sign is white and positive messages are written in red, such as ‘trans and proud’ or ‘in spite of everything, I’ve found love’ or ‘I’ll never let fear paralyse me again.’ Just like in the other cities, the performance was done in Belgrade’s central square, where a lot of people pass by, so they would stop and read the signs. A total of 15 people participated in the performance, and we had about 30 allies supporting us from the crowd. Important to mention is that this performance started in Montenegro and spread into other Balkan countries. It was also performed in Zagreb before the 1st Balkan Trans Inter pride.”

Sasha Lazic, Geten, Serbia



Performance
“Masks” in
Belgrade,
written by
Spektra.
Photo credit:
Aleksandar
Crnogorac.

UKRAINE

“Pride marches are held in the Ukrainian capital every year. However, they are focused on the ‘general LGBT’ agenda which is often reduced to gay issues. While trans people are also attending these marches, they never got enough visibility at them. So, in 2016 Insight decided to organise Trans March in Kyiv which is led by trans people and dedicated to their agenda including political demands to the state. After the success of the first march, it became an annual event. Now this is the powerful tool to mobilise the trans community and to bring the attention of the media and general society to the situation and problems of trans people. Unfortunately, it also got the attention of ultra-right groups, so the 2018 March was attacked and disrupted by them. Despite that, next year the march gathered even more people, so we don’t give up and continue to fight for our rights.”

Inna Iryskina, Insight, Ukraine



Trans March in Kyiv, Ukraine.
Photo credit: Insight NGO



TGEU video for TDoR 2017.



TGEU video for TDoR 2018.



TGEU video for TDoR 2019.

Conclusion

TGEU and its project partners have been conveying messages about anti-trans violence to civil society and the general public for many years. TGEU considers it essential to support organisations in their work around wellbeing and increase organisational development of the trans communities in Europe and Central Asia.

This document has evidenced many challenges TGEU and its partners face while doing monitoring work, mainly the lack of human and financial resources, and the difficulty in offering follow-up processes and services that could mitigate the effects of re-traumatisation of the victims and the potentially emotional distress experienced by those involved in reporting and collecting violence-related data.

It is vital that international organisations and funders assist the trans movement in monitoring initiatives, including training and capacity building, peer-to-peer counselling and support, safeguarding policies and code of conduct, and resources and capacities to work on violence prevention measures, paying particular attention to the wellbeing of the activists working on anti-trans violence worldwide.

